

Andrews University

Digital Commons @ Andrews University

Faculty Publications

5-1-2020

Compassion and Conflict: Exploring the Jesus Model

Gerald A. Klingbeil

Andrews University, klingbeil@andrews.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs>

Recommended Citation

Klingbeil, Gerald A., "Compassion and Conflict: Exploring the Jesus Model" (2020). *Faculty Publications*. 3155.

<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs/3155>

This Popular Press is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact repository@andrews.edu.

COMPASSIONATE

The venerable English *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* defines *compassion* as the “sympathetic consciousness of others’ distress together with a desire to alleviate it.”¹ Antonyms include “callousness, coldheartedness, hard-heartedness, or heartlessness.”

Nobody likes to be called “hard-hearted” or “callous.” But we frequently wonder what compassion really looks like. Responses to the continuing refugee crises around the world from politicians and religious leaders often include references to compassion. Unfortunately, there are also other reactions, including fear, rejection, or nationalism. What is compassion to some means “selling out” to others. Compassion seems to be a hot-button topic, often resulting in passionate conflict.

“I HAVE COMPASSION”

Jesus’ ministry was filled with compassion—and with conflict. The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) contain repeated references to Jesus’ compassion for the people that He met. As Jesus moved around Judea and Galilee and saw the multitudes following Him, “He was moved with compassion for them” (Matt. 9:36; see also Mark 6:34). This compassion was

a response to the needs of people surrounding Him.


Jesus saw them and knew that they were “weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd” (Matt. 9:36). Sheep can be stubborn and stupid—and they are lost without a shepherd caring for their needs. Jesus really *saw* people around Him. He didn’t just glance or skim the crowd. He knew their individual hurts, their guilt, their diseased hearts and bodies. Compassion drove Him to heal their hurts, to forgive their sins, and to renew their hearts and restore their bodies (Matt. 14:14). Compassion moved Him to feed a crowd of more than 4,000 who had followed Him for three days (Matt. 15:32-38; Mark 8:1-10).

But Jesus’ compassion wasn’t limited to crowds or an anonymous “world.” He engaged people individually. He touched two blind beggars outside Jericho and healed their blindness (Matt. 20:34). He touched and healed a leper pleading for restoration (Mark 1:41, 42). Touching a leper made Him ceremonially unclean. He could not enter the temple unless He underwent ritual purification. When Jesus saw the

Compassion and Conflict

Exploring the Jesus model





grief of a widow who had lost her only son (and, consequently, her only financial support), compassion for her plight moved Him to action. “Do not weep” (Luke 7:13) really meant that death could not prevail. “Young man, I say to you, arise” (verse 14) anticipates sure victory. Jesus raised a number of individuals during His time on earth. These resurrections all demonstrated His all-encompassing compassion and commitment to save lost and dying people.

Jesus knew about the power of compassion. Motivation and attitudes featured profoundly in His teaching. In one of His most famous stories, the parable of the good Samaritan, the lack of compassion distinguishes the good guy from the bad guys (Luke 10:33). It’s the Samaritan, the hated outsider, who has compassion and takes care of the injured man—not the priest, nor the Levite. That’s not how stories were told in first-century Judaism. Priests, Levites, and scribes were the ones doing God’s will—at least, that’s what they publicly and repeatedly claimed to do.

COMPASSION IN CONFLICT

Jesus’ engagement with Jewish leadership was complex. He took time to nurture Nicodemus’ nascent faith during a nighttime conversation (John 3). He healed the daughter of Jairus, the ruler of a local synagogue, in response to her father’s plea (Mark 5:21-43; Luke 8:40-56). He ate repeatedly in the homes of Pharisees (Luke 7:36-50; 14:1). Jesus knew that *all* the world—including Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes—needed His grace.

Often, however, He found Himself in conflict with Jewish leadership. They followed His every move; they laid traps and dreamed up ploys to make Him say the one thing that would finally get Him killed.

Jesus didn’t thrive on conflict,

even though He never compromised on issues. Rather, He cried over those who had vaccinated their hearts against the softening influence of God’s Spirit (Luke 19:41-44; Matt. 23:37-39). When He spoke judgment against the Jewish leaders of His time (Matt. 23:13-39), He had tears in His eyes.² While He never wavered under their unrelenting criticism, His heart yearned for their transformation.

Jesus’ compassion encompasses not only the Jewish nation. Salvation is aimed at “the world” (John 3:16). His final command, reported in the Gospel of Matthew, urges His followers to “make disciples of all the nations” (Matt. 28:19). He never thought small or limited His offers of grace.

THE MIND-SET OF JESUS

Paul’s hymn describing the mind-set and attitude of Jesus in Philippians 2:5-8 is key to understanding the compassion of Jesus. The Creator of the universe, coequal with God, made Himself “nothing” (NIV), “taking the very nature of a servant” (NIV), and humbled Himself “to the point of death” (NKJV).

How is this possible? This kind of commitment is possible only when it’s driven by love—unselfish, always-giving, never-changing love. We see glimpses of this kind of love as we peruse the story of Jesus in Scripture. We get hints of this commitment as we see Jesus engaging His world—including His enemies. Jesus’ love, God’s love, is the only viable engine driving compassion for a world that was bent on hurting Him and, ultimately, killing Him.

Ellen White summarized this kind of love perfectly: “All the paternal love which has come down from generation to generation through the channel of human hearts, all the springs of tenderness which have opened in the souls of men, are but

Jesus really saw people around Him. He didn’t just glance or skim the crowd. He knew their individual hurts, their guilt, their diseased hearts and bodies.

as a tiny rill to the boundless ocean, when compared with the infinite, exhaustless love of God. Tongue cannot utter it; pen cannot portray it. You may meditate upon it every day of your life; you may search the Scriptures diligently in order to understand it; you may summon every power and capability that God has given you, in the endeavor to comprehend the love and compassion of the heavenly Father; and yet there is an infinity beyond. You may study that love for ages; yet you can never fully comprehend the length and the breadth, the depth and the height, of the love of God in giving His Son to die for the world. Eternity itself can never fully reveal it.”³

I need that kind of love in my life! ☺

¹ See www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/compassion, accessed February 6, 2020.

² See Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898, 1940), p. 620: “Divine pity marked the countenance of the Son of God as He cast one lingering look upon the temple and then upon His hearers. In a voice choked by deep anguish of heart and bitter tears He exclaimed, ‘O Jerusalem, . . .’”

³ Ellen G. White, “The Inestimable Gift,” *Review and Herald*, Oct. 22, 1908.

Gerald A. Klingbeil is an associate editor of *Adventist World*.